

Obedience to God, rather than Men,

RECOMMENDED IN

4.

A SERMON,

PREACHED AT TAUNTON,

On FEBRUARY the 22d, 1795;

BEING THE SUNDAY

BEFORE THE LATE

F A S T D A Y.

By THOMAS BROADHURST,

Minister of a Congregation of Protestant Dissenters

IN TAUNTON.



Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth.

PAUL.

There is, as we may not improperly call it, a perpetual fast, to which we are obliged, as rational creatures, and as Christians, namely, a fast from all intemperate affections, turbulent passions, and irregular practices. JORTIN.

TAUNTON: Printed by T. NORRIS,
For J. NOON, Ilminster, and sold by him; J. JOHNSON, St. Paul's Church-yard,
London; Mr. CLARKE, Manchester; B. FLOWER, Cambridge; and
T. NORRIS, Taunton.

Obedience to God, rather than Man

RECOMMENDED IN

A SERMON

PREACHED AT TAUNTON

ON FEBRUARY 10th 1831

BEING THE SUNDAY

BEFORE THE LATE

FAST DAY

BY THOMAS BROADHURST

Minister of the Congregation of Freeborn Dissenters

IN TAUNTON.



Who are called to judge. To be wise in the
knowledge of God.

There is, as we may not improperly call it, a particular
obligation, as rational creatures, and as Christian
believers, to investigate religious questions, and to
ascertain the truth.

THE END OF THE MATTER

TAUNTON: Printed by J. MORRIS,
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J. Morris, Taunton.

TO THE READER.

THE author of the following discourse is one of those, who thought it inconsistent with the genuine spirit of Christianity to observe the days, appointed for public fasting and humiliation, during the present war; and accordingly refused to officiate on the two last of these occasions. For thus venturing to judge and act for himself, it has been his lot (as it has been the lot of many during the present agitated state of the political world) to be regarded as a disaffected and seditious person; and to have a considerable portion of misrepresentation and calumny poured upon his character*. It is not his

* Such circumstances would be too trivial to be mentioned, were it not to shew the spirit of the times. For what are these, when compared with the sufferings of such men as Priestley, Winterbotham, Muir, and Palmer? Or with the hardships, which the distinguished victims of ministerial persecution have lately endured, although so honourably acquitted of the crimes laid to their charge?

design,

design, at present, to explain the motives of his conduct. These, however, he will not scruple to avow, were purely of a religious nature; and are stated, without reserve, in the subsequent pages. In fact, he is at a loss to discover, what connection there can possibly be, (at least with regard to himself as a Dissenter) between the performance of any devotional service whatever, and loyalty or disloyalty to government. He trusts he is at all times ready "to render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's;" but it is also his duty, "to render unto God the things that are God's*."

He will take the liberty of saying, that no arguments have as yet induced him to relinquish the sentiments he has adopted; that the more he reflects upon it, the more his mind is satisfied with the part he has acted, whatever construction some may have put upon it; and that, by adopting such sentiments, and acting so obnoxious and unpopular a part, he violated no law, either human or divine.

* Matthew xxii. 21.

He

He feels no unfriendly emotions towards any, who may have thought an obscure individual, like himself, an object worthy of abuse and calumny; but wishes well to all around him, whatever their religious or political creeds may be;

Tros Tyriusque mihi nullo discrimine agetur;

and prays for nothing more fervently, than that the happy time may speedily come, when differences of this kind will no longer make any encroachments upon the most pleasing and important of the Christian duties, the law of charity; and when the family of mankind will become a family of brethren.

Aspice venturo latentur ut omnia sæclō!

He fears the present composition has but little claim to the reader's attention. It is one of his weekly productions, as a preacher; and was written with not the most distant view to the press. At the request of a few friends he has been induced to bring it forward
to

to public notice; and as literary fame is not his ambition, but a wish to serve the cause of religion, he can truly say, that his labours will be amply repaid, should the sentiments advanced in it prove at all beneficial within the narrow sphere, in which they will probably be doomed to circulate.

TAUNTON, *March 4, 1795.*

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to

A SERMON.

Acts v. 29.

WE OUGHT TO OBEY GOD, RATHER THAN MEN.

THIS was the animated defence, made by Peter and the other Apostles, when brought before the Jewish council for preaching the doctrine of Christianity. The astonishing success which had attended their ministry, and the multitude of converts which had been made in Jerusalem, excited the jealousy and indignation of the Jewish priesthood; who must have been the more incensed against them, because all hope of crushing this rising sect by the crucifixion of their leader had now vanished. The resurrection of Jesus, and the effusion of the Holy Spirit upon his Apostles, had revived their drooping courage, and inspired them with resolution and zeal superior to every difficulty. They wrought miracles, and taught the sublime truths of Christianity

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before

before the eyes of their most implacable enemies. The Jewish priesthood (as was observed before) were unable to bear, without envy and jealousy, their growing influence; and determined, at all events, to put a stop to it. They accordingly laid hands upon the apostles, and threw them into prison. But God did not forsake them amidst their sufferings. He sent an angel by night, who opened the doors of the prison, and bade them go preach in the temple the doctrines of eternal life. They readily obeyed the divine summons; and, early in the morning, taught in the temple. At the same time, the high priest and elders of the people assembled in council, to decide the fate of the apostles. They sent to the prison to have them brought forth: its doors remain in a state of perfect security: the guards were standing before them: but no prisoners were to be found. Amazement seized every one. No account could be given of the matter, nor information respecting the prisoners; till a messenger came, and told the council, they were preaching in the temple. Upon this they were sent for: and accordingly made their appearance. The high priest thus interrogates them: "Did we not strictly command you, that ye should not teach in this name; and behold! ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon
"us?"

“ us? Then Peter and the other Apostles answered and said, we ought to obey God rather than men*.”

The truth, propriety, and spirit of this answer are highly worthy of admiration. The Apostles asserted, that they had authority for acting as they did, greater than any which could be derived from men; that they had a master to obey, greater than the high priest, greater than the elders and the whole Jewish council, arrayed in all the pomp of spiritual sway. The authority, upon which they acted, was from heaven: of this they had received the most convincing proofs; and no persuasion, no menaces, no influence whatever could induce them to abuse it. They were assured that God alone was their master; and that obedience to his commands was due, even in opposition to all the powers upon earth. The language of the Apostles, upon this memorable occasion, is not less deserving of our consideration, than their conduct is worthy of our imitation.

It will therefore be the object of this discourse to enlarge upon these important topics;

* The striking similarity between this bold apostolic answer and the language of Socrates, in his defence of himself, is not undeserving the attention of the classical reader: Εἰ οὖν με, ὅπερ εἶπον, ἐπὶ τέλοισι ἀφίοιτε, εἴποιμ' αὖ ὑμῖν, ὅτι ἐγὼ ὑμᾶς, ὡς ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, ἀσπάζομαι μὲν καὶ φιλῶ, πείσομαι δὲ τῷ θεῷ μᾶλλον ἢ ὑμῖν. Vide Platonis Apologiam Socratis, Sect. 17. Ed. Forster.

and to draw from them such reflections, as may conduce to our religious and moral improvement.

We propose, in the first place, to state the grounds of obedience to God, and obedience to men.

We are bound to render obedience to God, because his will is the supreme law; because whatever he requires must be reasonable in itself; and because it is our highest interest to obey him.

God has an undoubted right to lay what commands he pleases upon his rational creatures. He, who has given life to all, who has endued us with every faculty we possess, and furnished us with every enjoyment of which we partake, has an unquestionable right to impart his blessings upon whatever conditions he pleases; and to direct our faculties, both of mind and body, to whatever uses he sees fit. And since he has so created us, as to be able to know his will, either by the exercise of unassisted reason, or by express declarations of it in scripture, an unlimited obedience is due to him, in all cases, in which we can discover his sovereign pleasure.

This argument will come with greater force to our minds, if we consider, that whatever is agreeable to the divine will, must necessarily be right in itself, and therefore entitled to our obedience. A being, possessed of infinite wisdom,

dom, rectitude, and goodness, cannot possibly demand an unreasonable homage. Sooner would the Almighty cease to be what he is, sooner would he cease to exist, than impose any unjust claims upon his creatures.

It is the highest interest of man also to obey God. Not only our present comfort, but every hope of future felicity depends upon him. Whether we wish to be happy in this world, or the next, it is our interest to serve and please our Maker. In every view, therefore, obedience to God is a just and reasonable duty.

With respect to obedience to man, it should be observed, that, in certain cases, it is laudable: as when we pay it to magistrates, vested with lawful authority; to parents, guardians, and masters; or to any, who are entrusted with power over us for our benefit. But the obedience, referred to in the latter part of the text, is of a different kind. It is an obedience which is not meritorious, but criminal; which originates, not in a sense of duty, but in a servile timidity; in a love of ease, and favour, and popularity; or in a sordid, worldly interest. It is the offspring of a corrupt mind, and a groveling heart; of a heart, dead to all the finer feelings of sentiment and principle, and which never rises above earthly considerations. It is the rule of conduct observed by those, who stand in the midway between virtue and vice; between God and the world; who know
their

their duty in most cases, but in some have not the resolution to practise it; who profess to be lovers of religion, but in whose eyes pleasure and profit have more powerful charms. Such are the different grounds of obedience to God, and obedience to man, as placed in opposition to each other in the words of the text.

Secondly; We propose to state in what particular cases we are bound to obey God, rather than men.

We are bound to obey God, rather than men, in all cases, in which religion and conscience are concerned. This is a grand and fundamental principle. It was upon this principle that Jesus and the Apostles acted, when they first planted the gospel. For had they been solicitous to please men, they would never have preached doctrines so contrary to the prevailing sentiments of the times in which they lived, so hostile to the inclinations of the fashionable and the gay; or so disgusting to the generality of their countrymen. Had the favour of men been the object of their ambition, they would not have attacked, with so much severity of censure, the corrupt principles and manners of the Jewish priesthood; who, they must have known, had it in their power, whenever they were inclined to do it, to excite the hatred and resentment of the populace against them. If it had been the ruling maxim of their conduct to please men, would these distinguished

tinguished characters have died for the cause in which they were engaged? Or would the history of the Christian church have been adorned with so shining a list of martyrs to the truth, if such men had acted upon a temporizing principle? It requires no great portion of historical information to know, that many of those, who in their conduct have opposed the favourite practices and maxims of the times in which they lived, have been afterwards found to have been the best of men, and the greatest benefactors to mankind. How then did they attain this eminence? By obeying God, rather than men: by following truth, rather than error: the dictates of conscience and of duty, rather than established and popular opinions.

Upon the same principle was the reformation from Popery effected. Had those, who bore the chief part in bringing about this happy event, been desirous of advancing their present interests, they would never have drawn from the eyes of the world the thick and almost impenetrable veil, with which the ambition and avarice of the Romish church had covered them.

Here it may not be improper to observe, that these are the chief reasons, upon which we dissent from the established church of this country. We deem it right to follow the word of God, and not the interpretations of
men

men. The articles, the creed, the liturgy of the religious establishment are appointed by authority of the legislature; and those, who acknowledge this authority in religious matters, are bound to receive whatever principles the civil magistrate may be pleased to impose; and to worship God, in whatever manner he may think proper to appoint. In fact, they surrender their judgments into his hands. But it is a grand article of our dissent, that the civil magistrate has no such right; that we have liberty, not only to read the word of God, but to regulate our faith and conduct, according to the best light we can derive from it; and that while we conform to the laws of the civil power, in all cases which relate to worldly concerns, we may entertain whatever religious sentiments we please, and worship God, in whatever way, and at whatever time we think best. These privileges, or rather rights, are secured to us by law: no one can, without injustice, disturb us in the enjoyment of them: and he must be very imperfectly acquainted indeed with our principles, who imagines that any command with respect to religion, even though it may proceed from the highest authority, can extend to us, as long as we are thus protected. In claiming this right to dissent from the religion of the majority of our countrymen, we only claim the same right which they themselves exercised, when they
threw

threw off the odious yoke of the Church of Rome; so that they cannot reasonably blame us for following their example. In fact, it is never intended, when any order is issued by the magistrate respecting religion, that it should affect us*. The civil power would act unwisely and unjustly, were it to require any such obedience. It should know, that we cannot comply with such requisitions, if expressly intended to reach us, without a violation of our principles: and it ought to be too well acquainted with the value of conscientious and respectable citizens† to impose any

* Since this sermon was composed, the writer finds, that the proclamation for the late Fast extended, not only to members of the established church, but even to dissenters; supposing it were his Majesty's gracious intention to apply the affectionate terms "loving subjects" to them. It runs thus, "We do strictly charge and command, that the said public fast be reverently and devoutly observed by *all* our loving subjects." See a Letter in the Protestant Dissenter's Magazine for April 1794, subscribed J. T. R. the sensible writer of which (though apparently no advocate for the observance of fast days) is of opinion, that those Dissenters (he might have added Churchmen also) who absented themselves from public worship on the late fast, "disobeyed the express command of the executive government." But to whatever extent the civil power intended its mandate to reach, the observation is still true, that such injunctions respecting religion do not, in the eye of the law, affect those, who enjoy the benefit of the Act of Toleration.

† The author hopes he shall not be charged with sedition for using this word. The *Gallipolia* however seems at present to be so great, that a prudent man will be cautious how he introduces any terms into his conversation or writing,

any harsh and rigorous terms upon them. But with regard to its own church, the church established by law, it requires a strict and implicit obedience to all its injunctions. Whatever it prescribes, its ministers must execute: whatever words it puts into their mouths, they must pronounce: whatever ordinances it appoints, must be duly administered; or those, who are disobedient, will be subject to its displeasure, and guilty of an offence against the authority which they profess to acknowledge. Such are the leading principles of those who embrace the established religion, and those who dissent from it; from which it appears, that they stand on the different grounds of obedience to God, and obedience to man.

The arguments, by which obedience to God, rather than men, in matters of religion, is

which might tend to infect his countrymen with this terrible, and seemingly incurable, disorder. Great praise is due, on this account, to the present Lord Chancellor of Ireland; who, when it was lately proposed, in the upper House in that kingdom, to vote: "That Earl Fitzwilliam had the confidence of the House and the *people*," objected to the terms "confidence of the people," as favouring too strongly of French phraseology, and wished that the motion should rather be thus expressed, "That Earl Fitzwilliam had the thanks and confidence of *the House*." The offensive and contagious phrase was accordingly expunged; and the noble Lord's *most admirable* emendation unanimously adopted! *Risum teneatis, amici?* See the Cambridge Intelligencer for March 14, 1795.

vindicated

vindicated, are clear and unanswerable. It is allowed by all parties, that the scriptures contain the will of God: and we have already proved, that no authority can be superior to God's will. No act of parliament, no royal proclamation, no decision of bishops or of councils, can supersede the allegiance we owe to God; and if, in any single instance, we forfeit this allegiance, we are guilty of an heinous offence against him.

It is objected, that in the scriptures are many things "hard to be understood*;" many, which the illiterate and vulgar cannot easily comprehend; and that therefore it is the duty of those, who are high in authority, and eminent for learning, to explain and interpret these difficulties to such persons; and to require them to assent to, and believe, whatever their superiors may be pleased to impose upon them. In reply to this it may be asked, whether these eminent and learned men be not themselves liable to error? whether they do not often differ among themselves? whether they have received from heaven a greater portion of penetration and judgment, than the rest of mankind? and, in conjunction with these superior talents, a special commission for interpreting the word of God? Upon examination we shall find, that they are fallible, like ourselves; and that we can with

* 2 Pet. iii. 16.

safety build our faith upon no other foundation, than that of "the Apostles and Prophets, and of Jesus Christ, who is the chief corner stone*" of our religion. It should also be considered, that religion is a personal thing; and rests only between our own consciences, and our Maker. For was not the Gospel addressed to all? Are we not individually accountable for the use we make of it, as well as for the improvement of every faculty and talent we possess? If then we are all responsible, at the bar of Almighty God, for our conduct, is it not right, that we should have the privilege of regulating it, in whatever manner we think most conformable to his will, and the aids we enjoy from revelation? Or is it likely, is it possible, that any other person should be more interested, than we ourselves are, or at least ought to be, in the formation of right principles and manners? Will those, who undertake to direct our faith, and who claim a surrender of our judgments and consciences into their hands, take upon themselves to undergo any future danger we may run, or punishment we may incur, by thus tamely relinquishing the important privileges which the God of heaven has bestowed upon us? This, we may venture to say, they would not be inclined to do, were it possible; and therefore as they would neither be disposed to

* Eph. ii. 20.

do it, nor would have it in their power to do it, if they were so disposed, it follows, that human authority in religion is unjust and fallible, and that the words of eternal truth, as contained in the bible, are the only standard, by which we are to form our faith, or to regulate our practice.

Since therefore it appears, that the principles we are recommending governed the conduct of our Lord and his Apostles, since they are sanctioned by the word of God, and confirmed by the example of great and good men, who have invariably acted upon them; we should be careful never to deviate from them in our conduct. In every thing which relates to religion, whether in principle or in practice, we should banish from our minds every other consideration but this: is my belief, is my practice authorized by scripture? If they be, my principles are just; my conduct is honourable: in whatever light they may appear to men, I am justified in the sight of God. But if we pursue a less upright conduct, if we study to obey men, and from motives of servile complaisance or base timidity, surrender our religious privileges to any human authority whatever, we then act an inglorious part indeed, and deeply stain our Christian character. In such circumstances, our services are not only a disgrace to religion, but an abomination to the great searcher of hearts. Yet this

this is not all. We involve ourselves in alarming danger by such conduct. For it is evident,

Thirdly, that unless we have become callous to every sentiment of honour and integrity, we must injure the peace of our own minds, by thus acting an inconsistent part.

There is a pleasure and satisfaction, arising from a strictly upright and conscientious conduct, which surpasses every other enjoyment; and which he alone can experience, who regards the will of God as the supreme law, and regulates his conduct by his principles*. Such as violate this rule, and sacrifice truth to interest, or fashion, or pleasure, cannot view their conduct, especially in moments of cool reflection, without remorse. They have a sting within their breasts which gives them perpetual pain; which torments them by night and by day; and greatly diminishes their happiness. But there is a still greater hazard which such persons run: they endanger their everlasting salvation. So important are the interests of divine truth, and so great our obligations to maintain and promote them, that the disciple of Christ is commanded to be faithful to his master, on pain of forfeiting his most pleasing hopes and expectations. "Whoso-

* Hic murus æneus esto,
Nil conscire sibi, nullâ pallefcere culpâ.

"ever," says our Lord, "shall confess me
 "before men, him will I also confess before
 "my Father which is in heaven, But who-
 "soever shall deny me before men, him will
 "I also deny before my Father which is in
 "heaven*." "Whosoever shall be ashamed
 "of me and of my words, of him shall the
 "Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come
 "in his own glory, and the glory of the Fa-
 "ther, and of the holy angels†;" with many
 other declarations of scripture to the same pur-
 pose, which might easily be produced: all of
 which tend to shew the extreme danger into
 which we bring ourselves, if, from any motive
 whatever, we be led to desert our religious
 principles. These considerations are truly
 awful, and deserve our most serious attention.
 For what is there, in the whole circle of terres-
 trial enjoyments, which can make amends for
 the loss of our dearest hopes? Can the favour
 of man, which we may sometimes gain by so
 ignoble an obedience, compensate for the
 absence of our heavenly Father's favour? Can
 earthly treasures and distinctions recompense us
 for the loss of our "treasures in heaven," and
 of the honours there reserved for the faithful
 servants of God? These, alas! will afford a
 very poor and inadequate return for what we
 must sacrifice, in order to obtain them! We

* Matthew x. 32, 33.

† Luke ix. 26.

shall

shall purchase the smiles of the world at a very extravagant price, and pay too dearly for pleasures, so transient and unsatisfactory.

III. Let us, therefore,

Fourthly, as the best method of forming a proper habit of religious obedience, accustom ourselves to regard divine truth as the most important and valuable of all objects, and God's authority, as superior to any upon earth. When we read what is required of us in scripture, let us consider, that it is the Supreme Being himself addressing us; and may our ears be shut to every other voice, and our obedience be paid to none but our heavenly Father. Let us beware also of entertaining too great a love of the world; since nothing has a more powerful tendency to withdraw the mind from a sense of duty, than such an attachment. We have too many examples of the truth of this assertion, in the indifference to religious principles and duties, in the majority of those who are termed people of fashion; whose God is Mammon, and whose creed is pleasure; who are ever ready to fall in with any customs and practices, which are sanctioned by sounding names and high authority, without attending to their propriety or impropriety; and whose mouths are always open, to join in the clamor and censure which may be raised against those, who presume, upon any particular occasion, to think or to act

act in a manner different from themselves. It is a painful reflection, that the influence of such persons should be so extensive, as to affect almost every other description of men; and even those, who profess to entertain religious principles in greater purity than others. I now refer to ourselves, as Protestant Dissenters; and fear it is much to be apprehended, that, together with the formality of our venerable forefathers, we have laid aside much of their integrity and firmness. The world seems to have entangled us in its snares; and our conduct appears to be too much governed by its smiles or its frowns. We are too anxious to have "all men speak well of us;" not considering the "woe," which the greatest character, that ever appeared upon earth, has pronounced upon those, who are thus flattered by the applause of the world*. We are not, in many cases, sufficiently zealous of our principles; and, in others, we seem to be ashamed of them. Some of us shrink, and tremble at being thought Dissenters. But why? Is it because we have excited sedition in the state? Is it because we have grasped at supreme power? Is it because we have been less loyal, less industrious, or less peaceable than our fellow citizens†? Our consciences acquit us of these

* Luke vi. 26.

† It is no easy matter, in the present time of political ferment, to discover, what is the exact meaning of the term "loyal."

Quo teneam vultus mutantem Protea nodo?

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these charges: and the malignity of our bitterest foes cannot bring them home to us. Then why are we ashamed of our principles? Shall we be ashamed of them, because corrupt and venal men may judge it their interest to attempt to brand us with infamy?

The advocates for political doctrines, now in fashion, limit it to those who are supporters of the present "just and necessary war," as it is called. In this sense it is readily granted, that the Dissenters in general (be it spoken to their honour) cannot be called "loyal." But if by loyalty be meant a rational attachment to the constitution, as settled at the revolution; a love of liberty, both civil and religious; and an ardent wish for a more equal representation of the people in parliament, it is highly probable that the Dissenters, of all denominations, are as loyal a body of men, as any in the kingdom. The author will not deny that some among them have imbibed republican principles. So also have some of the members of the established church. But will this appear surprizing, when we consider the civil restrictions imposed upon Dissenters; the unkind and ungenerous treatment they have, in many cases, lately received; and the general disposition, that has for some time prevailed in the nation, to stigmatize them as disaffected and turbulent subjects? Such usage is certainly not the best calculated to inspire esteem, or to secure confidence. What wonder then, if some, while eagerly endeavouring to avoid one extreme, should run into its opposite?

Incidit in Scyllam, cupiens vitare Charybdim.

With reference to the political principles and conduct of the dissenters, the curious reader will not fail to peruse the Welsh Freeholder's sensible and spirited "Farewell Epistles to the late bishop of St. David's."

As to the peaceableness of their character, no one, who is at all acquainted with them, will entertain a doubt. They have destroyed no places of worship, demolished no dwelling-houses, nor obliged any of their countrymen to seek an asylum in foreign lands, to escape the unbridled fury of their mobs; circumstances, which certainly cannot be stated in honour of some of our countrymen; as others of them can testify from dearly bought experience.

Because

Because the advocates of arbitrary power may wish to intimidate the firm friends of civil and religious liberty? Or, because they may be anxious to drown the voice of reason, and to check the spirit of reform, which is so widely diffusing itself, by alarming outcries of plots and danger? Shall such phantoms affright us, and cause us to waver in our principles, and to fall in with the corrupt maxims and practices of society? Shall wicked insinuations, and unfounded assertions, which not only our present, but likewise our past conduct so plainly contradict, terrify us from our obedience to God? No. There are considerations, infinitely to be preferred to the favour of man, and the charms of the world, which ought to influence our minds; and we should be extremely cautious, never to indulge so great an anxiety after the one, nor to be so much captivated by the deceitful allurements of the other, as to lose sight of these considerations. Whenever we do this, our respectability is gone; our honour is lost; and our separation from others, on account of religious principles, only serves to point us out the more strikingly, as examples of inconsistency, and objects of contempt.

An occasion now presents itself, my brethren, on which it is our duty to keep our attention steadily directed to the principle contained in the text. This nation is again called upon by

its chief magistrate, to observe a solemn and religious fast; to confess its manifold sins and transgressions, at the throne of Almighty God; and to implore the blessing of heaven upon its arms by sea and land. That we have abundant reason for humble penitence, and devout contrition, as a people laden with iniquity, is but too manifest and notorious to all the world. Princes, legislators, and magistrates, as well as ourselves, have sinned, times without number, and have many and aggravated crimes of their own, for which to deprecate the indignation of the Supreme Ruler of the world. Dissenters, it must be confessed, have hitherto been in the habit of observing days thus appointed by public authority. But does it not behove us, upon the present occasion, to revolve the following considerations, seriously in our minds? How far are we authorized by our principles, in complying, in such cases, with the requisition of the civil magistrate? Whether, if we accustom ourselves to render obedience to him, merely in the appointment of a day for public devotion, though he may not prescribe to us any particular form or mode of worship, we may not be gradually induced to make still greater concessions to his authority; till at length we give him the sole direction of our religious faith? Whether, by the observance of such days, we do not countenance the abuse of religion to purposes of state

state policy? Whether christianity do not forbid all wars whatever? At least, whether it sanction the horrid maxim of drawing the sword, for the purpose of maintaining its authority, of converting unbelievers, or of inspiring a regard for the sacred injunctions of peace, of justice, or of humanity? Whether it be honourable to religion, to make it an instrument to inflame the passions of one nation against another; to kindle enmity, spite, and hatred; or to excite men to carnage and bloodshed*? Whether we be not acting a disingenuous and criminal part towards God, and imposing upon our fellow creatures, by appearing to fast, and by a seeming compliance with the command of the civil magistrates, when we cannot sincerely unite with him in his prayers, or wish success to his designs? Or lastly, ought we not to consider, when we list

* In what a multitude of speeches, sermons, and pamphlets, have we been exhorted to engage in the present war, in defence of religion? In defence of religion! Shocking thought! Surely not in defence of the religion of Jesus, who taught us, "when smitten on the one cheek, to offer the other also;" Luke vi. 29. who "commanded his servants not to fight, because his kingdom was not of this world;" John xviii. 36. and who used this solemn language to the Apostle Peter, for defending his beloved master by force of arms, "Put up again thy sword into its place; for all they that take the sword, shall perish by the sword." Matt. xxvi. 51, 52. Before a sincere Christian, therefore, can be induced to draw the sword in defence of religion, is it not necessary for those divines, who preach such a doctrine, to point out in what of the *New Testament* it is found?

Hic labor, hoc opus est.

to

to heaven our hands, defiled with human blood, whether we do not insult the God of Peace, and Father of Love? Whether the Lord will not, in such cases, hide his face from us? Whether, when we make many prayers, he will not refuse to hear, and will say unto us, "This people draw nigh unto me with their mouth, and honour me with their lips, but their heart is far from me?"

These considerations deserve our most serious attention. It is not our duty to enquire, what the world may think or say of our conduct. We ought to act in whatever manner we judge most conducive to the honour of religion, and the peace of our own minds. "We ought to obey God, and not men." If, however, in such cases, we make a handle of religion, merely to please the world, or to avoid the ridiculous imputation of disloyalty, we do it an irreparable injury. We mistake egregiously, if we imagine, that such compliances are in no respect criminal; or suppose, that religious services can, at no time, be otherwise than

* Matt. xv. 8.

The question, with respect to the observance of public fasts by dissenters, is ably discussed in the following publications; "Civil Mandates for Days of public Worship, no Argument against joining in it, by the Rev. J. Simpson;" "An Answer to the said pamphlet, by the Rev. Mr. Williams;" a "Reply to the Rev. Mr. Williams's Answer, &c. by the Rev. J. Simpson;" an ingenious sermon, "by the Rev. D. Jardine; entitled, Seasonable Reflections on Religious Fast;" and an excellent "Discourse on National Fast, by W. Fox."

proper

proper and seasonable. For it is indisputably true, that any religious act, which proceeds from dishonest motives, or is founded on temporizing principles, is, for this sole reason, sinful and wicked in its very nature, and odious in the sight of God.

On this account it highly behoves all, who bear the Christian name, to consider, that a time is coming, when their whole conduct will be strictly examined; not according to its appearance in the eyes of men, but according to the real motives which influenced it. Every species and degree of insincerity and hypocrisy, whether in their religious devotions, or in their moral characters, will then be unravelled and exposed. Those who, from motives of slavish timidity, or worldly interest, have obeyed men, rather than God, will be covered with confusion; while those, who have never prostituted religion to secular purposes, who have made it their uniform study to obey God, and not men; to follow truth, and not fashion; will receive distinguished honours, and be crowned with immortal glory.

FINIS.

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